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PAGEANTRY IN AMERICA

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When Louis N. Parker, the great English pageant master, was invited to Boston to discuss the desirability of pageants in this country, he said among other things, "In England, where we are so democratic, pageants are sure to succeed, but in America, where you are so aristocratic, I am in doubt about their success." When asked by his surprised listeners what he meant, he explained that in England if a person of distinction wished to undertake anything, he had no difficulty whatever in getting a large following to help carry it out; in this country, on the contrary, where every man's opinion is sufficient for himself, we have an "aristocracy of individuals" which makes concerted voluntary co-operation difficult to obtain in any kind of undertaking. Every individual has to be convinced separately, and even when convinced he may or may not lend a hand. Moreover, he may change his mind tomorrow.

Those who were at first disposed to take issue with Mr. Parker's criticism saw on reflection how true it is. We are lacking in spontaneous co-operation. If we want anything done, we hire it done and pay for it. We get nothing for nothing. Why should we expect it? Why is that not fair and right? Because the finest progress in the world is made by those who have a live interest in the work that is above hire, a determination for improvement and progress which makes them forget self-interest for the time being and work with a spirit of comradeship and enthusiasm that makes anything possible.

It may be argued in this period of sharp competition that giving of one's time and effort for nothing is a luxury which most people cannot afford. Experience proves, however, that in the great vital things of life it is far more blessed to give than to receive (it is only active creative interest that has something to give), and as a nation we cannot afford to bring up our children without some conception

and practice of this truth. This self-sufficiency, this individualism which we have allowed to grow up among us is producing strange results in our social and civic life. For instance, we are inconceivably slow in making improvements which are obviously necessary in every town and city of our country. All the intelligent people in a community will know for years that a grade-crossing is dangerous, that a political clique is corrupting their government, that their milk supply is unclean, and yet for the want of whole-hearted co-operation they will wait for death and disaster to bring about reform.

Again, in the matter of recreation which should give new strength and inspiration for harder and finer work, each individual little group enjoys itself in its own way and by itself. Where is there a large joyous neighborhood spirit? When does a whole community work all together for a thoroughly good time? When a community wishes to have a celebration, what is done? A committee is chosen, money is appropriated, and performers are hired to furnish entertainment. The committee is worked to death and gets plenty of fault-finding for a reward. The main body of citizens do nothing but look on critically and wonder where the money went to, while the younger people eat, drink, and scream all they can and have what William Orr aptly calls an "orgy of pleasure," from the fatigue of which it takes them several days to recover. This is not recreation in any sense of the word. Furthermore, these celebrations are often intended to inspire patriotism and to create civic pride and enthusiasm. How can they do it? Well, we know they do not. If we are dissatisfied with conditions as they exist, we often find help in reflecting on what the ideal condition would be. Then little by little we can approach it if we will.

An ideal public celebration would stir every member of the community with a delightful feeling of anticipation. Everyone would be conscious that this is the town's day, when every effort will be made to show it at its best. Fault-finding and differences are forgotten. Exhibitions of all kinds show to native, as well as to stranger, the best that the town has accomplished in its different departments. Games, dances, plays, and music in which all par-

ticipate strengthen the feeling of good-fellowship and give pleasure and recreation to people of all ages. In all this enjoyment there should be something worth remembering, something inspiring, something that will bear fruit for the future. A pageant, a "drama of the community" acted by its own people, would leave in the minds of all the lesson taught by the past and the duty of the present. Mr. Parker defines a pageant as "a festival of thanksgiving to almighty God for the blessings of the past, the opportunities of the present, and the hopes of the future." Mr. Langdon, the American pageant master, says: "A pageant is the drama of a community in which the place is the hero and its history is the plot." It is a time when the community is conscious of itself, sees its past brought to life again by its own people, assisted by its artists, poets, musicians, whose talents may have been unrecognized, perhaps unsuspected, before. All the town's resources are mustered to show all the good there is in it. Everyone contributes whatever he may have to offer, whether it be an idea which he has "always thought would be a good thing to try" or an old-fashioned costume, an ox-cart, or a flying-machine. He who has nothing else to give contributes money, which is used for a grandstand and such things as no one in the town has to give.

Arthur Farwell has said that a pageant is a medium of expression between an artist and a great listening public. For once everyone has a chance to express the hope, the dream, or the song which has been waiting for years, and for once everyone listens. It has been said that Americans have borrowed their language, their music, and their art because they have none of their own. This is true because we have been busy working out the greatest triumph in human freedom on the earth and as yet have had no time to reflect or write or sing about it. But there are signs that this is becoming less true. The seeds of our five centuries of history are bearing wonderful fruit. Our explorers, our pioneers, our Indians, our patriots have laid a foundation so firm and splendid that it is worthy of the finest structure which we are able to build on it for the future. As we see the pageant of the years pass by, we pay our tribute of wondering admiration to the devotion, the success, and the progress which we behold. We mark the failures and their

causes and pledge ourselves through the knowledge of them to see that they are never repeated.

An Englishman said a short time ago: "We are tired of pageants in England. They harp continually on the past and we need to consider the future." Many large pageants had been given within a short space of time in the restricted limits of England itself, where the weight of the past is felt with more appreciation than anywhere else, but if he had been so fortunate as to see the great tercentenary pageant of Quebec, the pageant of South Africa, the durbar of India, and the celebration of the United States of Australia, our Englishman would have had a spectacle of past, present, and future that would have tired him in the opposite direction.

America is so vast and so varied in its own confines that, while its past is not unwieldy and no one may safely disregard its lessons, its present and future possibilities are unlimited, and these its pageants should teach. Although pageants have been given here for a number of years, few people have seen even one and many do not know yet what they are. We need their unifying influence, their civic inspiration, their opportunity for our own national and local expression; and most of all we need them as a demonstration for our children of their heritage and their place in it all. For as far as we teach our children to act for the best, just so far do we contribute our share for the future, and, strange as it may seem, very little of their education comes either from books or from teachers. For example, after a lesson in civil government one day a boy came to me and said: "Yes, I know the way you say it is the way it is in the books, but that isn't the way my big brother does it down in the ward room." Again, four boys came in a body and presented this question: "You taught us to be honest. What shall we do when our boss tells us to lie about our goods?" So the men they work with are their teachers in life. And who are their real heroes—the ball-players and the pugilists? We would not have it so. But their heroes of the past and present whom we should like to have them love and imitate must be live men of action and of flesh and blood. Have you read Mary Antin's last story of the boy who could not play George Washington because he had lied? There is

the true secret of it all. I do not think it would be so easy for a man to lie who had impersonated the father of our country and had received the admiring gaze of hundreds of his neighbors and their children. Several hundred little ones were gathered in the gymnasium at Clark University on July 4 of this year preparing for their episode in the pageant. All unsuspecting Uncle Sam passed through the hall on his way to the campus. The rousing cheers from the boys mingled with the delighted squeals of the little girls made a sound as startling as it was spontaneous, and Uncle Sam's face was good to see. The children love these heroes. They know they are not real and yet to see them represented in the flesh and to act with them stirs child and grown-up from the inside and gives a conception of the real man such as no book or spoken word or even a portrait can do. To have seen a cave-man fight for his game, to have sung an Indian lullaby to a papoose, to have made a low courtesy to General George Washington, or to have seen Paul Revere mount and ride makes a difference in the life of a patriot, young or old. "The more I think of our pageant, the more I find in it to think about," said one young girl. If this is true of all and the thought prompts to action for the home town, this pageant, this big community history lesson, has reached its ideal. The pageant should come but rarely, not more than once in five years, so that the illusion may never be spoiled by becoming commonplace and so that time enough may have elapsed to show on each occasion a marked improvement in the town, for "the town is the hero."

In a recent article John Collier says:

Pageantry—the new pageantry—is not only the birth of a new art, or the rebirth of a lost art. It is the birth of a new educational ideal. It is the forerunner of a distinctly different and a distinctly higher civic and social life. . . . Incidentally pageantry is the form of art which comes nearest to expressing the new social idea which is already moving through a hundred million minds, and which is destined to make the world over during the next century or so; and the most general definition of the new social idea might be that it believes in freedom through co-operation. . . .

The historical definition of pageantry means merely a pompous and evanescent ceremonial parade with vaudeville features. But the pageantry developed in recent years is anything but a meaningless parade. It is community drama, as distinct from individual drama. It symbolizes, in a thousand

possible ways, the growing and striving community, depicted through a long course of time, gathering up into its soul the growing tradition and idealism, the strivings and hopes of its generations of men and women.

Pageantry, viewed by this idea, is the great modern art just being discovered, and is made possible only through the existence or imminent potentiality of the new social idea. It rests on community consciousness and brotherhood. It creates them in its turn. It may be said to constitute, along with orchestral music, the typical nineteenth- and twentieth-century art.

What Americans will do with this new art remains to be seen. Its possibilities are wonderful and peculiarly adapted to the needs and the mission of this country. America has long been synonymous with opportunity; it is becoming synonymous with teacher of self-government. In spite of the horrible waste of man's and nature's energy in this country, in spite of the efforts of selfish and vicious greed which hamper her progress and strangle her inspiration, our Columbia holds her head proudly erect and blesses her present-day knights and heroes, who are silently fighting her great battle for human freedom. To profit from the fruit of that battle, she must teach all her children to understand and to cherish it, to swell the ranks of those who love justice and right and forsake the ranks of liars and cheats.

The usefulness of pageantry in this country has been pretty thoroughly proved by American pageant directors during the past five years. A great need has been felt, however, of organization in the work, and through the courtesy of the Twentieth Century Club of Boston a conference of pageant masters of America was arranged to accomplish this. A series of meetings was held January 31 and February 1, 1913. These were attended by about eight hundred people, and a large amount of valuable information was brought to a focus. A permanent organization called the American Pageant Association was formed, consisting of a body of membership open to all persons interested in the subject and the following pageant board: President, William Chauncy Langdon, New York City; Secretary, Lotta A. Clark, Trinity Court, Boston; Treasurer, Howard H. Davenport, Somerville, Mass.; Directors: Ellis P. Oberholtzer, Philadelphia; Thomas Wood Stevens, Pittsburgh; Arthur Farwell, New York; Mrs. E. A. MacDowell, Peterborough,

N.H.; Frank Chouteau Brown, Boston; Peter W. Dykema, Madison, Wis.; Margaret MacLaren Eager, Old Deerfield, Mass.; Porter Garnett, San Francisco; Frank H. Brooks, St. Johnsbury, Vt.; George F. Kunz, New York City; Vesper Lincoln George, Boston; Virginia Tanner, Dorchester, Mass.; Percy MacKaye, Cambridge, Mass. Its duties are to establish a standard of pageant and festival work in the United States and serve as a clearing-house for information in this field.

The scope of the association includes all dramatic or semi-dramatic and festival activities of a distinctly community character. From time to time, it will issue to its members bulletins containing notices of pageants and festivals and other related information. It is planning a second conference on pageantry during the winter of 1913 and 1914. One of the special features of this conference will be an exhibition of a collection of pageant material, including posters, pageant books, programs, photographs, etc., of the principal pageants already given in this country and abroad. Applications for membership may be sent to the secretary with a check for one dollar to pay annual dues.

The association will use its influence to prevent the pageant from becoming commercialized, to preserve the name "pageant" for true pageants only, and to maintain a standard of pageantry so high that those who place the name of their town on record as having given a pageant may always have reason to be proud of it.

The association has already done a great deal in advising and assisting communities desiring to give pageants, and the demand for its pageant masters has been greater than it could supply. Additional talent is being discovered and developed in this field. Any town which has a coterie of earnest workers who love it, can give a pageant, with proper guidance, and the future holds promise of some extremely interesting ones. So far the great city pageants have been given in the East, but in 1915 San Francisco will have a splendid opportunity of showing the country its greatest achievement in pageantry. In 1920 there will be a tercentenary celebration in New England. Plymouth will lead by honoring the memory of the pilgrim ancestors who laid the cornerstone of New England history. But that is not all. A plan is already formed to

celebrate that week throughout New England; to call home her sons and daughters wherever they may be; to show them their history come to life again upon their native soil, and let them take account of the contribution which has been made during their three centuries toward this new art—this distinctly American art—government by the people.